

THE BROKEN COIN

By EMERSON HOUGH (from the Scenario by GRACE CUNARD)
AUTHOR of "THE LADY and the PIRATE," "JOHN RAWN," ETC.

COPYRIGHT, 1915 BY WRIGHT A. PATTERSON

NINTH INSTALLMENT

SYNOPSIS.

Kitty Gray, newspaper woman, finds in a curio shop half of a broken coin, the mutilated inscription on which arouses her curiosity and leads her, at the order of her managing editor, to go to the principal of Gretzhoffen to piece out the story suggested by the inscription. She is followed, and on arrival in Gretzhoffen her adventures while chasing the secret of the broken coin begin.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

The Trap.

"Mademoiselle, give it to me! Let us end all this."

The voice of Count Frederick was agitated. For once he had met a situation sufficient to shake him from his calm.

Kitty Gray made no answer, as she shrank back, the coin tightly clasped in her hand. She cast on him a look so full of womanly anger as might have scorched him—an anger now devoid of fear. "Will you not?" The man's voice had in it now something almost of pleading. Count Frederick felt something of shame at his own part in this.

"No," she answered at length, her own voice low and even, panting out the words. "No, I will not. Come and take it from me if you dare. You have done that once, why not again?"

He turned away with a sudden gesture, his face red in chagrin over the justice of her taunt.

"You remember that?" said he. "What remains? Must I be yet more rude with you? It is not that I like the part, mademoiselle; be sure of that. It was not myself but my man who laid hands upon you that other time."

"He is still your man. You yourself still are willing to persecute a woman and a stranger. You are no better than he."

"Suppose I am not, then. Does it look as though you would gain much by defying me? Come, now. The coin is nothing to you; it is everything to me. I swear it is more than I thought it ever would be. It is life and death for me, and more than that, mademoiselle. Would you stand between me and an ambition such as that? I would repay you a hundredfold in any way you needed, if you would but listen to reason. But perhaps a woman does not know the word for reason."

"No, I do not. I remember only one word, and that is hate for you! When my chance comes I shall still remember that. In turn I will put you behind the bars if ever the opportunity comes to me. And you shall stay there always for all of me. I hate you!"

Count Frederick smiled grimly. "There is comfort in that word, mademoiselle," said he. "Rather than leaden-eyed indifference, at least. But as for me, I do not hate you, neither am I indifferent toward you. I only—at least, mademoiselle, I try only to think of the coin and what it means to me."

"If it belonged to you, monsieur, it would have gone to you long ago. If you ever owned it you would own it now."

A sudden change came over the face of the nobleman as he caught the conviction in these words. They touched for him some consciousness long left unawakened.

"What do you mean?" he asked in a low voice.

"What is it that you mean when you say that?"

"When Frederick, count of Gretzhoffen, deserves this coin; when he earns it, when he gains title by virtue of right thoughts and deeds, then perhaps it will come to him; surely not before this coin," she held it now out before her in her hand. "It will come eventually to that place where it belongs. It is seeking for that place now. The people really own it. They ask freedom and justice and liberty. And now you ask me why I cling to it; why it clings to me. I suppose it is because something impels me, compels me, to do what I have done."

Count Frederick turned to compose himself to a situation of greater comfort. As he did so, and was about to seat himself upon the lower stair, something fell from the pocket of his coat; something which he had brought with him from his room, in the hope that it had not been observed there by this woman. It fell now face upward on the stair between them, and he saw that she had seen it. He accepted the fact, and at first did not attempt to pick up the little picture, for it was the little picture which he had brought with him from his room.

"You saw, mademoiselle?" said he. "I had hoped that you would not."

"Yes, I see it now; I saw it before in your room," answered Kitty contemptuously. "You ask why I venture into your apartments now and then. Have I not the right? May I not claim my own property? I am not familiar with the laws of Gretzhoffen. Indeed, it seems to me there are no laws in this land. Not knowing how to replevin my property by process of law, what shall I do—wait and lose it, or take my own when I find it?"

Count Frederick smiled at this.

"You claim the coin also by that law?" said he. "Very well, I claim my picture by that law. Possession is nine points of the law of any land. Will you trade this for that?"

"No," spitefully.

He remained silent for a time, at length sighing. "Quite right," said he. "Neither would I, if our positions were reversed. Nor would I, things remaining quite as they are!"

"There is no bargain concluded," said he. "So then I suppose we will wait here until doomsday."

"Yes," viciously.

"Agreed, then, mademoiselle. With your permission, may I light a cigarette? Till doomsday! I would rather spend my time here than any place I know."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

New Problems.

Meantime the agencies of the law were in charge of another situation which but now had arisen in the destiny of the dynamic Gretzhoffen coin. There had been murder done but now over this coin. The city was exerting all its force usually employed in the preservation of life and property. Swiftly a cordon of troops and of the local gendarmes had been summoned into action. The exits of the town were guarded. The gendarmes filled the streets near by, some guarding the crossings, others converging toward the point of greater interest, whence the alarm had come—the Ritz hotel.

The entire city was alarmed and on guard. That

criminal must act swiftly who now could hope escape. A captain of one squad of the gendarmes entered the hotel itself and swiftly approached the desk where stood the manager of the hotel, the clerk, many of the servants, including the hysterical maid who first had brought the news of the tragedy.

"What is this, monsieur?" demanded the officer, as he approached the desk, his quick eyes glancing over every detail about him. "Remain here, all of you. Let no one attempt escape. What is this, then?"

"We do not know, captain," began the clerk, who acted as spokesman. "This maid brings the alarm; she declares a man has been found killed in one of our apartments."

"What room was it, monsieur?"

"That belonging to a young American woman, a Miss Gray."

"Where is she?"

"I do not know, captain. She was here but now. We did not see her enter, but saw her leave. She

loud rapping came at the doors of Count Frederick's palace. "Open, in the name of the king!" came the summons.

The servants, terrified, lacking the command of their master, not knowing where that master was, knew no alternative but to obey. The door was opened. The captain of gendarmes and his squad entered.

"The master of this place," he demanded of the men who met him. "Where is he? Is he at home?"

"We do not know," stammered the major domo, the first to speak.

And while two of his detail held the servants in the lower part of the house, the others, led by the captain of gendarmes, started up the great stair toward the interior of the palace. Therefore they approached the position of Roleau, who had stationed himself in the hallway where the stair reached the first entresol.

All at once he heard the voice of Kitty, loud and clear: "Roleau! Roleau! A moi! Vite! Vite!"

possible. We must be released at once from detention."

The little group passed along the walk to the open curb of the street. It was Roleau who hesitated here, addressing the captain of gendarmes.

"Monsieur le capitaine," said he, "I see that you guard all the escapes possible to any guilty man. You will therefore allow me to step to the corner to summon a carriage for these two excellencies?"

The captain of the gendarmes hesitated for a half-instant, frowned, and then nodded.

Those who lingered for an instant saw Roleau walk leisurely toward the corner, raise his hand as though in a signal, and then break into a run.

"Wait," exclaimed Count Frederick, as he saw the plan of the quick-witted servant. "If you leave us we also might run away. We will pick him up, no doubt. Do you tarry here with us."

In fact, the captain of gendarmes, seeing his own party reduced by divisions to no more than a couple of men beside himself, hesitated, and turned to secure the safety of his more important cap-

The gendarmes, their captain, the prefect of police, turned away nonplused. The prefect hesitated as he faced the calm dignity of the nobleman.

"Your excellency," said he at length, "I dislike to ask of you the right of search. I comply only with formalities. If your excellency—"

"Certainly," said Count Frederick, and threw open his coat. But even as he did so the blood half left his face. He emptied his pockets on the desk of the hotel. The prefect of police separated the articles one by one, the gold coins, the dainty penknife, the keys, at last the jeweled picture in the frame! This latter he picked up, his gaze questioning upon the face of Count Frederick. Suddenly he turned to the young American, his eyes kindling.

"What! Monsieur le comte has the portrait of this woman?"

"Yes," said Count Frederick. "It is a portrait, as you have said."

"And you are a friend of hers? This looks as though—that is to say, how did you get this, then? Was it given to you, monsieur le comte?"

The nobleman looked his interlocutor fair in the face. "I do not lie, monsieur le prefect," said he. "No, it was not given to me."

"Then how came you by it?"

"I will not answer that."

"But you must."

"Then listen," broke in Kitty suddenly. "Let me tell you that picture was in my room, not framed as it is now, but unmounted. It stood on my desk. Now he has it, as you see. If so, he must have taken it."

As he heard these words the face of Count Frederick set in rigid lines.

"You found this, then, in her room, where, perhaps, you went sometimes, and you took it?"

"I do not deny it now," said Count Frederick. "Yes, I took it."

"Why?"

"That is none of your business," rejoined the nobleman harshly.

The prefect of police turned to his men. "We have not yet found all of those parties who may be concerned with this crime. We have not yet held our questions on the scene of the crime itself."

They turned, all of them, now, and approached the stairway which led to the floor upon which were located Kitty's apartments. Their numbers quite filled the hall as they advanced, preceded and followed by gendarmes. But suddenly, as they approached the spot, the captain of gendarmes touched the arm of his superior and pointed ahead.

"That is the man who escaped," exclaimed he. "Roleau, here he is, and coming from the room itself! But who is that with him?"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The Body of the Crime.

It had been easy for Roleau, as may be supposed, once he was free of the immediate presence of the officers, to spring into the nearest alleyway and quickly pass from sight. While the officer, in charge of his more distinguished prisoners, was passing in the car toward the front entrance of the Hotel Ritz, Roleau himself was speeding thither almost as quickly through devious passageways which led to the rear of the hotel. He was at the back door almost as soon as the car itself was at the front; and the delay of all the questioning which went on at the office of the hotel gave him the more time for certain plans of his own.

Attaining entrance at the rear, he sped up the back stairs, by the same route which he and his mistress had used so recently, and found himself once more at the apartments of Kitty Gray.

What he saw caused even his stout nerves to quail for the time. On the floor before him, with face half turned and arms outflung, lay the victim of the last adventure connected with the mysterious Gretzhoffen coin.

Carefully, yet using that speed which he knew was imperative, Roleau bent over, making such search as he could of the silent evidence of the crime. It seemed to him almost certain that he had seen this man somewhere, but he could not be sure. He stooped, hesitated, and then swiftly sprang aside and sought concealment behind the hangings of the room. He was sure that he had heard someone move in the rear room of the apartments.

He had no more than concealed himself before he had full evidence of the justice of his suspicion. He heard a rustling behind the curtain door, heard the slight shuffling of a step, and saw emerge from the concealing curtains a face which he knew well enough; he could not mistake that cunning, rattlelike chin, the shifting eyes, the almost silent footfall which carried him forward. Yes, Roleau knew Blake, knew him well enough.

Blake stooped over the body and knelt by its side, thrust a hand into the pockets of the coat, and at length drew out a folded paper, which he hurriedly crowded into his own pocket. Then he was about to arise, but at that instant he felt a tigerlike weight of the giant Roleau upon his own back. A hand caught his arm back of him, crowded it up toward the back of his neck, strained it into a position of excruciating pain. An arm came around his neck, choking him. He was helpless.

"Get up," said Roleau, at length, grimly. "I know you. So, you did this? Come along with me."

His right hand gripping the collar of his prisoner, and holding up the pinnated arm in such fashion as to leave its owner helpless, Roleau pushed his prisoner out ahead of him.

Now it was this strange apparition, of Roleau marching his prisoner before him, which gave pause to the procession of the law as it advanced toward the scene of the crime. The prefect of the city, his officers, Count Frederick, Count Sachio, Kitty Gray, all these others, paused now.

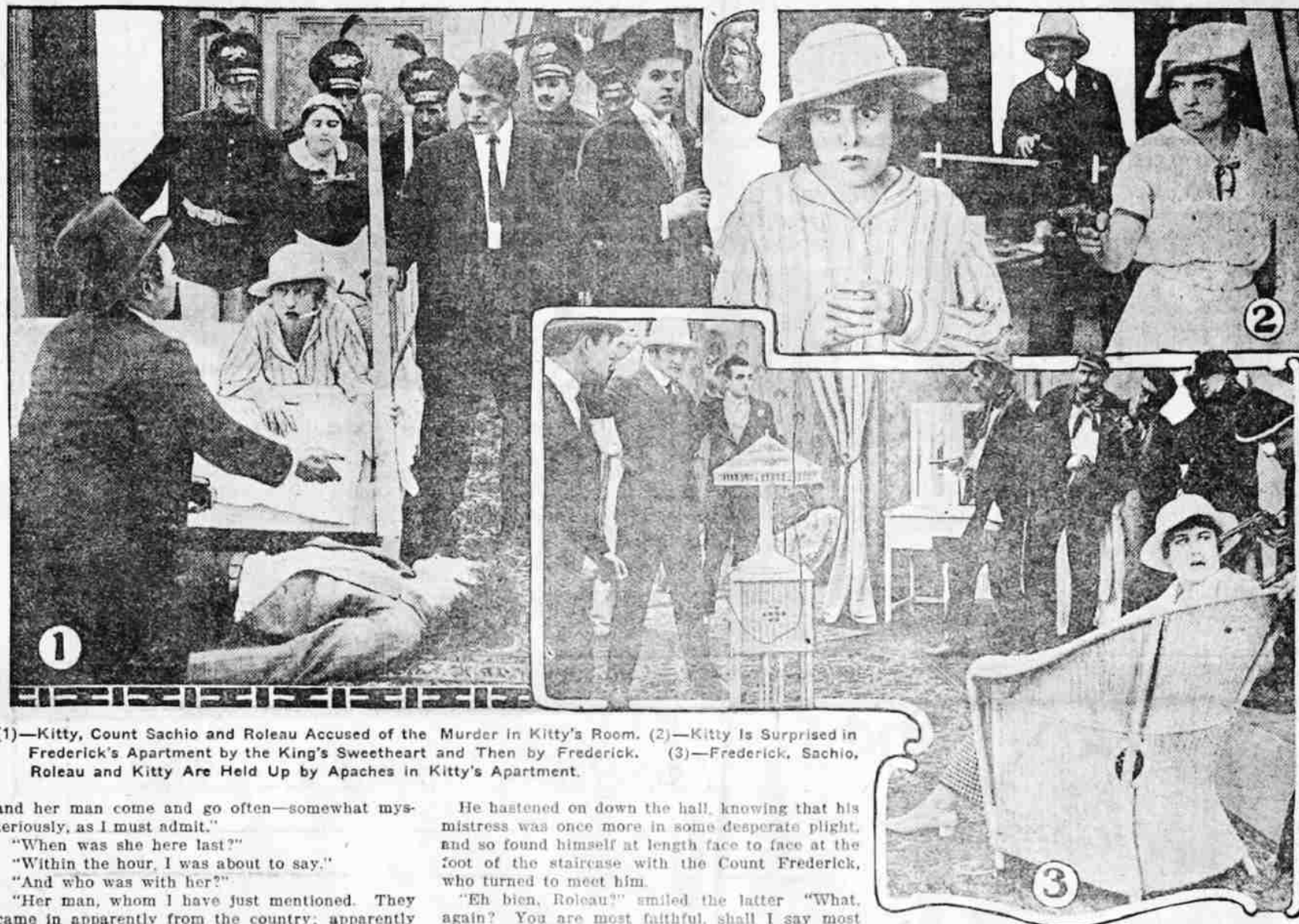
"What is that?" demanded the prefect imperatively. "Who are you, and what do you do with this man?"

"He is the guilty man, excellency," said Roleau stoutly. "I took him but just now in our apartments. He was bending over the dead man there when I saw him. I sprang upon him and took him, as you see."

"What you say may be true," said the prefect, as he cast a swift glance at the prisoner; "but we can jump at no conclusions. Retain him, retain them both. We will now see what the room itself holds."

The room, so far as any victim of a crime was concerned, was entirely empty. Everything was in order as before. There was no dead man there!

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



(1)—Kitty, Count Sachio and Roleau Accused of the Murder in Kitty's Room. (2)—Kitty Is Surprised in Frederick's Apartment by the King's Sweetheart and Then by Frederick. (3)—Frederick, Sachio, Roleau and Kitty Are Held Up by Apaches in Kitty's Apartment.

and her man come and go often—somewhat mysteriously, as I must admit."

"When was she here last?"

"Within the hour, I was about to say."

"And who was with her?"

"Her man, whom I have just mentioned. They came in apparently from the country; apparently from travel. They came in at the rear entrance, so it seems. Soon after her arrival a gentleman inquired for her."

"And where is that gentleman?"

The clerk looked about him. Count Sachio by this time had approached the door, and would have been glad enough to pass out. Detained by the porter for a time, he now had met the gendarmes, who allowed no one to leave the place. The captain approached him.

"Monsieur, you must join us for a time," and led him toward the desk, where he resumed his questioning of the hotel force.

"Is this the gentleman?" he inquired of the clerk. The latter nodded.

"What did this gentleman say?"

"He asked me where was the charming young woman, the American. He said he had known her before."

"Has anyone else inquired for the young American lately? Has anyone else been in her apartments?"

The clerk considered for an instant. "One other, monsieur le capitaine, yes."

"Who—when was it?"

"A gentleman whose name I dislike to speak in public."

"Speak; it is the law."

"Very well, then, it was Monsieur le Comte Frederick of Gretzhoffen."

"The Count Frederick, when was he here?"

"Ah, that was before the return of the young woman from an absence of several days."

The officer turned to his men. "Those of you who remain," he said, "will guard all these whom we have questioned here. Prevent all from leaving the hotel. I must go to find the Count Frederick himself and bring him here. Perhaps through him we may find something of the whereabouts of the young woman herself. Once we find her we have found the solution of this crime."

"Who was the victim?" he demanded of the clerk.

"That we cannot say. This maid alone has seen."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Stone Walls Do Not a Prison Make.

Roleau, guardian of the fortunes of his mistress, had remained at that portion of the palace which seemed to him most useful as a coign of vantage in watching against intrusion. He had not been aware of the quiet advance of Count Frederick when the latter had been summoned by the electric bell set off by Kitty's presence in his own apartments. He knew nothing of the device by which the count had managed to trap the intruder; knew nothing of the cause of the long silence on the part of Kitty, whom he had left alone in the count's apartments.

As for the attendants of the palace itself, no alarm came from them. In truth, they all were in the front part of the building, grouped near the great windows or the street door, whither they had been called by certain alarms. They had seen hurrying troops, had heard the challenge of the officers of the law. That challenge came closer to them. A little group of men marching hurriedly, men in uniform, now ascended the great stairs. A

He hastened on down the hall, knowing that his mistress was once more in some desperate plight, and so found himself at length face to face at the foot of the staircase with the Count Frederick, who turned to meet him.

"Eh bien, Roleau?" smiled the latter. "What, again? You are most faithful, shall I say most industrious, in the service of this lady? I would you had been so devoted in my own."

"As you please, master," replied Roleau, with aplomb. "But where is she?"

"She seems safe," said Count Frederick coolly, and waved a hand.

Roleau came front to front against the iron grille doors which barred egress for the inmate of the little prison.

"So then, this was why!" cried Roleau. "Open this gate, I say."

"Roleau, you will yet exhaust my patience. This is my home! I have had almost enough of your running back and forth in it as you like. This is the last time. Out of here, you follow."

"Is it so?" grinned Roleau savagely, his own mind upon the main situation of menace to his mistress. "There are things which even matters quickly, master. But as for this, I won't argue now. It is your own safety demands it. Listen, the men are coming—the officers—don't you hear them?"

"Who are coming?"

"The gendarmes. There is a charge of murder. They are after you, they are coming to search this house. If they find you with her, trapped, what will they do? Open, master, quickly, I beg of you. It is for the sake of her and yourself."

"I do not run," said Count Frederick, slowly. "If there is such a charge as this, certainly we shall meet it, for it is our purpose as well as theirs to find who are guilty."

"Come, now," he turned to Kitty as he drew the key of the lock from his pocket, "you have once more, by virtue of this exigency, mademoiselle, conquered me! I must set you free for a time."

He flung open the iron grille. Kitty sprang down the steps, clung to the arm of Roleau. A flush came to Count Frederick's face as he saw how she avoided himself. There was, however, no time for further speech. The sound of rapid footfalls came down the hall. The captain of gendarmes and his men were at the door.

"Messieurs, welcome!" said Count Frederick. "But why are you here?"

"Monsieur le comte, we ask pardon for the intrusion, but we must ask you to join us," replied the officer. He was impressed by the calm dignity of the count.

"For what reason do you desire our company, monsieur le capitaine? Is there any charge against us?"

"There is a charge of great severity to be laid against someone, monsieur le comte. We ask your aid to determine who that one may be. This young woman, who is she?"

"I am Miss Kitty Gray of America," answered the object of his suspicion. "This is my servant, Roleau. Who are you?"

"We are of the royal police, mademoiselle. A murder has been done in your room at the Ritz hotel. Naturally someone is under suspicion. Let me caution both you and Count Frederick not to speak. What you say may be used as evidence."

Count Frederick turned suddenly toward Kitty, a warning in his eyes. She stood, therefore, silent, looking at the man.

"Mademoiselle is in no sense responsible for any of this," said he to the officer. "We will all go with you and conclude this matter as quickly as

possible. While they paused they heard the quick wheels of a taxicab which drew up before them. After all, it was an open question what had been Roleau's intent, for certainly he had ordered this vehicle to come hither. Making the best of the matter, the captain of gendarmes motioned for his prisoners to enter the car.

Thus, silent and aloof, they arrived as prisoners at the grand entrance of the Hotel Ritz.

Kitty found herself face to face with a large man in full uniform, a man with a heavy beard and merciless eye, who now addressed himself to his subordinate.

"As to this man," he demanded, "why have you taken Count Frederick of Gretzhoffen?"

"Merely as ultimate suspicion," stammered the captain. "We found him in company with this young woman, in whose room the crime was committed. This other—" he pointed to Count Sachio, "also seems to have known this young woman."

"Who are you, then?" demanded the prefect of Count Sachio.

"I am Count Sachio of Grahoffen," replied the latter, none too happy at the situation in which he found himself. "I came to this hotel, as is often my custom when in this city. I inquired merely as a matter of courtesy as to the welfare of this young woman. Naturally, there is nothing of suspicion in that. I demand your release me at once. My own country will not tolerate an indignity to one of her subjects."

"Might I suggest to monsieur le prefect that we hasten," interrupted Count Frederick gently enough. "Mademoiselle is under a most trying situation, as you must understand. She has been ignorant of the customs of this country, perhaps somewhat free in her goings and comings; yet Gretzhoffen punishes not ignorance, but guilt."

The prefect had seen many women, not all of them innocent. He smiled grimly enough now as he noticed the beauty of the young girl, who stood pale and not wholly collected in all this turmoil. The girl now turned to him, and for the first time spoke.

"Monsieur le prefect," said she, "you cannot make guilt out of innocence. I can prove to you by this clerk and all these others that I was absent from the hotel for several days. When I came back it was but for a short time. I was absent when this crime was discovered. How can you connect me with it? Rather connect with it those who have had access to my room during my absence."

The official turned toward her thoughtfully, then to the captain of gendarmes. "Have you searched all these persons?" he inquired. The latter shook his head.

"So you do not know what evidence has been destroyed. Come, then, perform that duty now."

Without hesitation Kitty presented her handbag, drew out from it her little portemonnaie, even bag, drew out the pocket of her frock. Count Frederick watched her closely as she did so. He saw that none of the officers discovered the piece of coin. He suspected, although he did not know, that Kitty had palmed it under her thumb as she spread out her hands, asking them to certify themselves. Certainly the officers had not found the coin! He smiled at her shrewdness.